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THE MASS MEDIA AS AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION.

BY- GANS, HERBERT J.

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THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROVIDED BY BOTH THE MASS MEDIA AND THE SCHOOLS SHOULD BE ANALYZED. THIS RESEARCH WOULD CONCENTRATE ON NETWORK TELEVISION AND THE URBAN AND SUBURBAN LOWER MIDDLE CLASS SCHOOLS AND COMPARE THEIR SUCCESS AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. THE ANALYSIS COULD COMPARE THE STRUCTURES OF THESE INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS AND PROBLEMS (E.G. THEIR CONTENT, ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE, AND ROLES AS INSTRUMENTS OF SOCIALIZATION AND PERPETUATORS OF AMERICAN CULTURE). THESE MEDIA OFFER IDEALIZED ROLE MODES, A MORE REALISTIC "POLITICAL" VIEW OF CURRENT EVENTS AND INSTITUTIONS, AND TRAINING IN "CONSUMPTION AND SPECTATORING," IN CONTRAST TO THE 19TH CENTURY PURITAN TRADITION THAT THE SCHOOLS OFFER. BOTH INSTITUTIONS ENCOURAGE A MOBILITY WHICH IS STRATIFIED WITHIN CLASS HIERARCHIES AND WHICH DOES NOT UPSET THE STATUS QUO. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS SUCH AS THIS RAISES POLICY IMPLICATIONS ABOUT THE OPTIMAL ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING AND THE CONTENT TO BE TAUGHT WITHIN EACH OF THESE DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS. WITHIN THE PLURALISTIC TRADITION OF AMERICAN SOCIETY, BOTH INSTITUTIONS ARE COMPETING FOR "CULTURAL POWER," AND TO REAP THE BENEFITS OF THIS PLURALISM, ONE SHOULD DETERMINE THE AREAS IN WHICH EACH IS PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE AND IN WHAT WAYS EACH CAN BENEFIT FROM THE OTHER. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN "THE URBAN REVIEW," VOLUME 2, FEBRUARY 1967. (NH)

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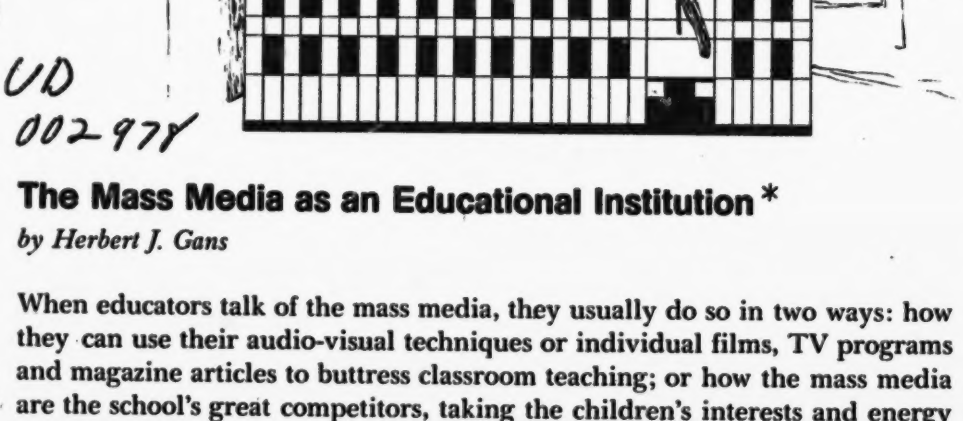

The Mass Media as an Educational Institution*

by Herbert J. Gans

When educators talk of the mass media, they usually do so in two ways: how they can use their audio-visual techniques or individual films, TV programs and magazine articles to buttress classroom teaching; or how the mass media are the school's great competitors, taking the children's interests and energy away from their studies and diverting these into frivolous, time wasting, and intellectually or emotionally harmful pursuits. Of these two views of the media, the second is actually more realistic, for in seeing the media as a competitor, educators acknowledge, if only indirectly, that they are an important educational institution. The mass media also teach, and their students learn, even if both the content and the method of instruction differ from those of the school. In fact, in some ways the media are an even more important educational institution than the school, for they outrank it in terms of size of operation and audience, in the amount of time and the intensity of interest devoted by that audience, and in the diversity of its course content.

We do not yet know enough about the impact of the mass media on their audiences to judge whether they help or hurt children — or the school. We can, however, look at the mass media as an educational institution, and study it as such, comparing its structure, functions, problems, and teaching effectiveness to those of the school. Such a study can show what each does better and more poorly and why, so as to provide findings that can help shape future policy for both institutions. The purpose of this essay is to develop some hypotheses about teaching and learning in the two institutions, and in this process, to suggest the kinds of research the Center For Urban Education hopes to carry out in the years to come on the mass media and education.

As any comparative analysis, mine will frequently treat the schools and the media as more homogeneous than they really are, and to neglect the variety within each. Indeed, most of my observations pertain to the numerically and culturally most important school and mass medium: the public school that serves urban and suburban lower-middle-class neighborhoods, and network television.

The Structure of the Media and the Schools

One can begin a parallel analysis of the mass media in terms of how their structure compares to that of the school. It should be apparent immediately that as the school, the mass media have teachers, but that they bear such names as announcers, commentators, entertainers, and reporters. Similarly, the students are called audiences, viewers, readers, and if they attend regularly, subscribers. Schools and teachers offer courses of study; the mass media provide television programs, films, magazine articles, and the like. The mass media's courses are more varied than the school's, but are often quite similar in subject matter; only the names have been changed. What the school calls social studies or civics, the mass media call news, documentaries and public affairs programming.

I am indebted to Lawrence Cremin, Robert Dentler, Peter Elkin and Rudi Haerle for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article.

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courses. There is a program executive or editor-in-c
the academic superintendent, a business manager or p
business matters, and a president or publisher who, l
of schools, runs the operation. Many of these men are li
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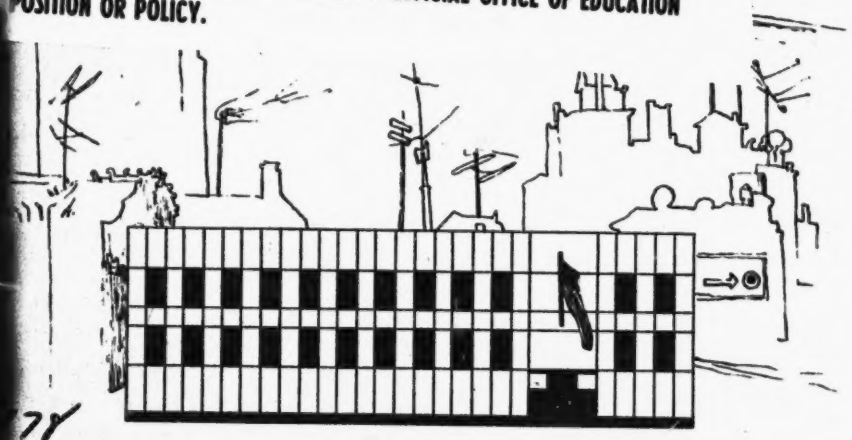

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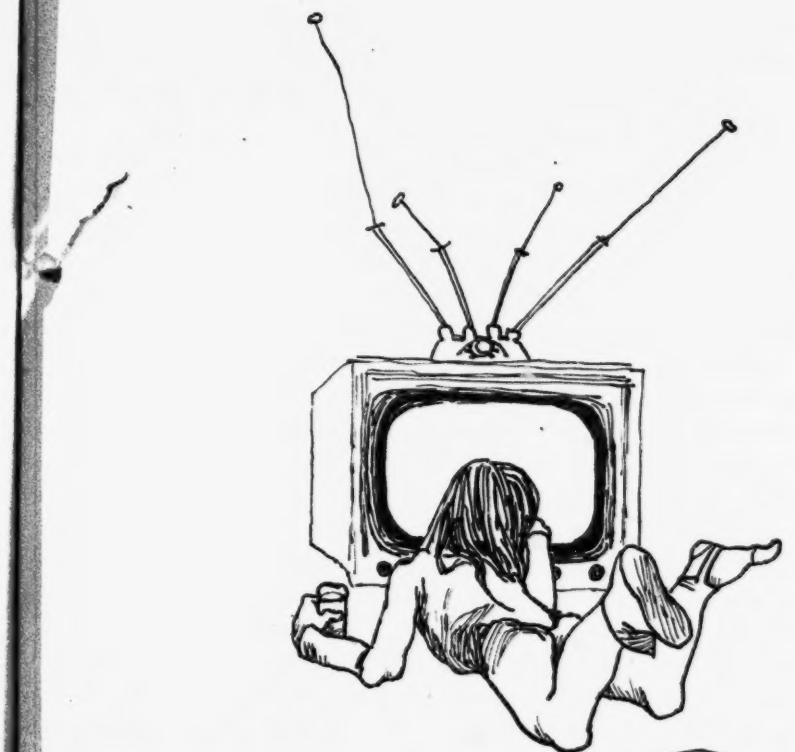
Moreover, these courses are also taught through diversion and entertainment. There are occasional TV programs, such as "Daktari," which provide information about geography and biology, but almost all TV programs and magazine fiction teach something about American society. For example, "Batman" is, from this vantage point, a course in criminology that describes how a superhuman aristocrat does a better job of eradicating crime than public officials. Similarly, the "Beverly Hillbillies" offer a course in social stratification and applied economics, teaching that with money, uneducated and uncultured people can do pretty well in American society, and can easily outwit more sophisticated and more powerful middle-class types. Television series such as "Bonanza," and "The Virginian," and most popular films and fiction are in reality morality plays, that show how a hero confronts a moral dilemma and how he finally makes a moral choice. These dilemmas are often quite contemporary and controversial; I have seen "Bonanza," one of the most popular TV programs, deal with questions of racial intolerance and intermarriage, albeit in a 19th-century Western setting. Programs such as "Law and Mr. Jones," "East Side-West Side," and "The Defenders" have discussed pertinent social issues in contemporary settings, although they have been less popular from a rating standpoint. And even the innocuous family situation-comedies such as "Ozzie and Harriet" deal occasionally with ethical problems encountered on a neighborhood level, for example, how to help the socially isolated child or the unhappy neighbor. Although the schools argue that they are the major transmitter of society's moral values, the mass media offer a great deal more content on this topic.

The administrative structure of the two institutions can also be compared. Behind the teacher stands a curriculum developer and, of course, principals, superintendents, and lay boards of education. In the mass media, the teacher is backed up by an editor or a director who prepares the course, and an executive editor or executive director, who is responsible for an entire group of courses. There is a program executive or editor-in-chief, who functions as the academic superintendent, a business manager or publisher who oversees business matters, and a president or publisher who, like the superintendent of schools, runs the operation. Many of these men are likely to be professionals (some trained in professional schools of communication) and like schoolmen, they carry out the policies made by laymen, company boards of directors. As in the schools, there is frequent conflict between professionals and laymen, and between those who disburse money and those who spend it.

One can also reverse the analysis and see how the schools resemble the media, and how operations found in the media are handled by the schools. The mass media have sponsors or advertisers who pay for putting on the courses; so do the schools, but they are more numerous and are called taxpayers. Since the schools are funded by taxes, there are no tickets to buy, except as ancillary fees, and there are no commercials except for varsity teams that advertise the school, political campaigns to vote in bond issue or school board elections, and of course, the many, many commercials that a teacher inserts in his or her day-to-day instruction in order to persuade the class to buy the product he or she is selling. As do the mass media, the schools offer entertainment as well as information, although in different proportions. The school's entertainment consists of varsity sports, the band, glee and drama clubs, but the people whom these entertain are parents and the general public, that is, the school's sponsors, not the school's regular audience. In fact, there is very little room for entertainment for students in the daily school fare — which may be one of the school's problems. What would happen to the attention and interest of the television student body if it were presented a steady diet of documentaries from 7 A.M. to sign-off time?

It would be wrong to suggest that the two institutions are entirely similar in structure; there are many significant differences. The most important of these is in the teacher-student relationship. The school enrolls an involuntary audience that has little choice in selecting its courses and teachers; the mass media attract a voluntary audience, that can choose both — and can reject those it dislikes. As a result, mass media teachers, like courses, are selected by their ability to communicate with their students and hold their attention. School teachers, on the other hand, are recruited by "professional" criteria and the teachers' ability to communicate with and hold the attention of the audience is of minor importance. And once the teacher has served some time in the system, he or she is given tenure, whereas the mass media teacher's contract can be cancelled any time his students no longer pay attention to him. In fact, in the media the students grade the teachers — through box office



results, ratings, and circulation figures, and through the critic, who regularly reports what was good or bad about last night's course offerings.

Because the students judge the teacher in the mass media, his curriculum and teaching method must differ considerably. Mass media courses are more topical, and more dynamic; the content of an individual course and the courses themselves change constantly; unpopular courses are not retained just because they have always been in the curriculum. Moreover, all the media's courses observe John Dewey's maxim – that one begins with the interests of the student, rather than that of the teacher – much more closely than the schools. The methods of the print media require reading as much as the schools, but all media, print or electronic, avoid lecturing, which is known to drive away the students. Most often, the media use a dramatic method: both in fiction and nonfiction content, they dramatize the issues and topics they present, particularly through characters who are either people like the audience or heroic figures who presumably represent what the audience would wish to be.

Finally, the social environment in which the media's students learn is quite different from the school's. Because school is compulsory, it is able to organize students into artificial groups called classes, and to enforce rules that regulate and restrict student behavior. These rules are intended to aid the school as an institution rather than the learning situation; to keep down costs, to maintain order – and the authority of the teacher – and to reduce individual expression. In the school, the student is the lowest status – and least powerful – member of a hierarchial organization run by the teaching staff, but in the media, the student is free – and more powerful. Because he has to be attracted, he has the right to choose what he wants to learn, and the conditions under which he will learn. He can study by himself or with his family or his peers. His behavior is not restricted by rules of decorum; he does not have to remain quiet when he wants to talk, and although he cannot talk back to his media teacher directly, he can write letters to him and criticize his teaching performance. And, since his choices ultimately determine the course content of the media, he is not treated as a person of low status or power. Even children are equals before the TV screen, and often they are more equal than their parents in choosing what is to be viewed.

The Functions of Schools and Mass Media

The two institutions may also be compared in terms of their functions: their manifest and latent purposes. Functions are difficult to analyze because, among other things, every institution has both *societal* and *segmental* functions, that is, functions for the society as a whole and for segments of it, and segmental functions vastly outnumber societal ones. For example, the mass media exist to make money for their stockholders and advertisers; and to provide diversion and information to their audiences. Similarly, the school system provides status, power, and high salaries to its administrators, educati and aid in child raising for parents, to name just a few. In th however, concentrate on some societal functions.

The societal functions of the school include among others tion of children for adult society: to prepare them to be wor law-abiding members of adult society; (2) the sorting of stu them for the socioeconomic stratification of adult society a enter one of its strata; and (3) the perpetuation of American

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The two institutions also handle the incorporation of ch stratified adult society in different ways. The schools stratify early age, for the neighborhood school and diverse tracking sys support the national class hierarchy. The school tends somewh meritocracy than the rest of American society, but for all pra class membership is assigned early and permanently; the yo bright in the first grade is given a strong push toward the the underachiever is quickly relegated to the lower class.

The mass media stratify more subtly. Magazines, and to newspapers are written for specific strata; e.g., *The New Yorke* middle class, *True Story* for the working class, although anyon either. Television and the movies side-step the existence of cla and comedies are peopled largely by affluent heroes and hero havior, however, follows lower-middle and working-class valu do not question the present class hierarchy but ignore its exist can do so mostly because they have little power to affect their position. They do, however, suggest that one can be well off a dinary folks" without adopting the aristocratic ways of the v cosmopolitan ways of the intellectuals, thus discouraging upw cultural mobility while favoring economic mobility.

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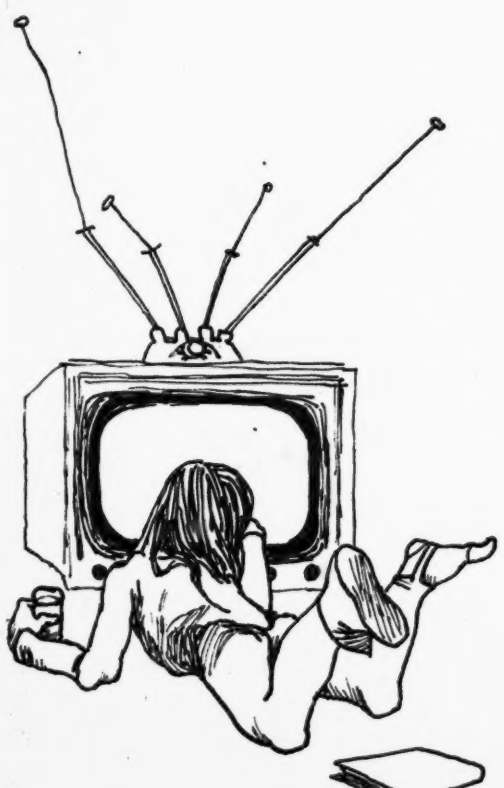
Drawings by Eleanor Magid.



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The societal functions of the school include among others: (1) the socialization of children for adult society: to prepare them to be workers, citizens, and law-abiding members of adult society; (2) the sorting of students; to prepare them for the socioeconomic stratification of adult society and train them to enter one of its strata; and (3) the perpetuation of American culture.

As the schools, the media socialize children for adult society, although by letting children attend adult courses, they give the child a greater opportunity for anticipatory socialization into adulthood than the school. The media do not train children in specific skills, for they do not teach the three R's. Instead, they provide images of desirable and prestigious occupations and role-models of people who fill these in ideal ways.

Conversely, the media train children more in the realities of citizenship than in the ideals; the news and documentaries of TV tell children more about politics than do school civic courses, which tend to teach an apolitical or anti-political model of government. In socializing children for citizenship, both institutions depict American society, but in different ways. Both tend to focus on the culture and problems of middle-class urban-industrial America, although school texts pay more attention to farmers and now, to nonwhite Americans, than the media. Both institutions play down controversy, although the media less so than the schools because controversy is news. But both select and distort in describing America; the media by emphasizing unusual and dramatic news — when men bite dogs; the schools by stressing the abstract and the traditional. Not only do they teach more about government than about politics, but they spend more time on the past than on current events.

The mass media differ most sharply from the school in that they train children how to consume and play and how to be family members, whereas the schools emphasize the ability to produce and work, and how to be colleagues and citizens. Commercials are a never ending course about the goods available in the society and how to use them, and both they and the television programs, films and magazines teach children how people behave in their off-hours and with their families. Many TV situation-comedies are also courses in parent-child and husband-wife relationships, teaching children how to get around their parents, and wives, to outsmart their husbands. The children's media (cartoons and comic books particularly) provide material in which children and young people fight and defeat authority figures (such as parents) and either drain off or stimulate (the data are sparse and the experts in disagreement) hostility toward them. The schools do not deal extensively with familial roles, although home economics and family life courses teach cooking and child rearing skills somewhat more directly than the media. But both institutions do little to teach children how to handle the most difficult phases of family life; sex and intrafamilial conflict.

The two institutions also handle the incorporation of children into the stratified adult society in different ways. The schools stratify children at an early age, for the neighborhood school and diverse tracking systems effectively support the national class hierarchy. The school tends somewhat more toward meritocracy than the rest of American society, but for all practical purposes, class membership is assigned early and permanently; the youngster who is bright in the first grade is given a strong push toward the affluent society; the underachiever is quickly relegated to the lower class.

The mass media stratify more subtly. Magazines, and to a lesser extent, newspapers are written for specific strata; e.g., *The New Yorker* for the upper-middle class, *True Story* for the working class, although anyone is free to buy either. Television and the movies side-step the existence of class; their dramas and comedies are peopled largely by affluent heroes and heroines whose behavior, however, follows lower-middle and working-class values. The media do not question the present class hierarchy but ignore its existence, and they can do so mostly because they have little power to affect their audiences' class position. They do, however, suggest that one can be well off and still be "ordinary folks" without adopting the aristocratic ways of the very rich or the cosmopolitan ways of the intellectuals, thus discouraging upward social and cultural mobility while favoring economic mobility.

Moreover, both institutions encourage mobility on the part of individuals: the schools by rewarding the poor but bright youngster with academic success

Drawings by Eleanor Magid.

and the certification that will help him get ahead; the media by providing models of middle-class behavior. But both institutions discourage upward mobility on the part of groups, particularly through political action. For example, the demands of Northern Negroes for participation in the affluent society have received only lip-service support from the schools and the media and neither has been especially favorable to labor unions. The two institutions are more likely to praise individuals who make good without upsetting the *status quo*.

Needless to say, both institutions seek to perpetuate American culture, but they differ sharply on the culture they seek to perpetuate. Indeed, one of the reasons for the deep antagonism between the mass media and the school is that they advocate different cultures. The school promotes the 19th-century Protestant lower-middle-class tradition; conservative, asexual "lower-middle-brow" art, music and literature, and lower-midle-class civic and social but nonpolitical community service (or do-gooding) — in short, a small town culture in which home, church, and civic club are the main pillars. The mass media support this culture too, but they also encourage the 20th-century non-Puritan culture of show business, and the latest fashions in dress, music, cars, and even politics, some of which will include working-class and low-brow styles. The school considers mass media fare "uncultured," uncouth, and because of its erotic and violent components, unwholesome; the mass media view school culture as dull, stodgy, and unfashionable. Moreover, the school preaches a culture of production and participation; the media, one of consumption and spectatoring.

The Problems of the Two Institutions

Another way of comparing the two institutions is to ask what problems each faces, and how, and how effectively it solves them. This kind of analysis brings out the differences much more than the similarities, for the two institutions have quite different problems, and what is problematic for one is not so for the other. The major problems of public education today would seem to me to include the following: how to teach children from low income and poorly-educated homes; how to provide equality, that is, education of equal quality to all classes and races; how to adapt to pluralism, that is, to meet the different needs of classes, races, ethnic groups, rural, urban and suburban children, to mention just a few; how to obtain the necessary public funds for the schools; how to attract qualified teachers; and how to cope with the competition from private and parochial schools.

In contrast, the mass media have no difficulty in attracting the poor, poorly prepared, "culturally deprived," or "intellectually disadvantaged" youngster — such words are never used in the media to describe him. Of course, he is neglected by the media perhaps even more than by the school; because of his low purchasing power, there are no television programs about poor people, and few magazines designed for them. However, the poor youngster seemingly does not mind sharing the fare prepared for more affluent audiences. He does not play hooky from this fare, seems not to resent it or the media teachers, and does not seem to suffer from a reduced I.Q. as a result of attending the media. Perhaps this is because mass media fare, being mass produced, is eminently equal; rich and poor, white and nonwhite can all choose the same films, TV programs and magazines. Nevertheless, the media are as *de facto* segregated as the schools; the proportion of Negro actors is surely lower than that of Negro teachers, and there are as few TV programs for Negro audiences as there are school courses in Negro history. We do not know how Negro audiences feel about watching "white television" although some data recently gathered by the Center among poor Negro and Puerto Rican New Yorkers suggest that they prefer programs about poor and nonwhite people to those about rich and white people; and nonwhite actors to white ones, although most of all they prefer integrated programs.* Even so, nonwhite audiences do not seem to be demanding black TV as much as black power or black dignity. As viewers and readers, they are, after all, integrated — and equal; they do not get an inferior or segregated "I Spy" even while they attend inferior and segregated schools.

The media also cater more to pluralism than the schools; they offer fare for all levels and styles of cultural taste, and magazines exist for all age groups, classes, and races, not to mention hobbies and distinctive cultural interests. Also, because the media allow their students freedom of choice, there is no stigma in choosing a Negro magazine as there is in being forced to attend a ghetto school, so that the values of pluralism and equa same time. The schools are not homogeneous either of offered in an upper-middle-class neighborhood differs class one. But here the pluralism is involuntary and children cannot obtain an upper-middle-class education and school segregation, and a lower-class minority in a school is often scorned and neglected by teachers and The pluralism of course offerings in the school is more the classification of students into grades discourages courses freely. In theory, the division into grades is al but the courses of the schools are less designed for the the children than even those of the media. That is, the se lum is not designed to meet the needs of the 13-year-old provide a progression from the sixth grade. If the curric for age needs, the seventh grade would be offering ch dealing with incipient puberty and heterosexual relatio

Unlike the schools, the media have no problem in obta fied personnel; some magazines may be faring more poo vertising since the emergence of television, but they do students on double or triple sessions. And, they can offer working-condition incentives which keep the supply of above the demand. Finally, the media have no problem in tition; they are flexible enough to change their courses their organization. A poor television program does not l these days, but how many schools drop an unpopular or or an inadequate teacher at any time?

Compared to the schools, the media have few problems with the other end of the audience spectrum. The ma zines, the television networks and Hollywood have had tracting the highly-educated audience and the intellect really worry the media, however, for being commercial not have to serve the entire population; they can ignore fact, perhaps the major problem of the media today is increasing sophistication and the changing demands of its television is currently faced with rising audience dissatisf suddenly drop to the bottom of the ratings, and the programs fail to survive their first year on the schedul encounter the same dissatisfaction, but it is not a problem many students are much better informed than their tea believe, when attendance is compulsory and school incom how students feel about what they are being taught, the to pay attention to audience dissatisfaction. In fact, they t

*Herbert J. Gans, "Audience Preferences for 'Reality' or 'Fantasy' in Mass M Education, dittoed.

e certification that will help him get ahead; the media by providing of middle-class behavior. But both institutions discourage upward y on the part of groups, particularly through political action. For ex- the demands of Northern Negroes for participation in the affluent have received only lip-service support from the schools and the media her has been especially favorable to labor unions. The two institutions re likely to praise individuals who make good without upsetting the o.

less to say, both institutions seek to perpetuate American culture, but fer sharply on the culture they seek to perpetuate. Indeed, one of the for the deep antagonism between the mass media and the school is y advocate different cultures. The school promotes the 19th-century nt lower-middle-class tradition; conservative, asexual "lower-middle- rt, music and literature, and lower-midle-class civic and social but ical community service (or do-gooding) – in short, a small town cul- which home, church, and civic club are the main pillars. The mass pport this culture too, but they also encourage the 20th-century non- culture of show business, and the latest fashions in dress, music, cars, politics, some of which will include working-class and low-brow styles. ool considers mass media fare "uncultured," uncouth, and because ic and violent components, unwholesome; the mass media view school s dull, stodgy, and unfashionable. Moreover, the school preaches a f production and participation; the media, one of consumption and ing.

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Unlike the schools, the media have no problem in obtaining funds or quali- fied personnel; some magazines may be faring more poorly in attracting ad- vertising since the emergence of television, but they do not have to put their students on double or triple sessions. And, they can offer financial, status, and working-condition incentives which keep the supply of staff members well above the demand. Finally, the media have no problem in coping with compe- tition; they are flexible enough to change their courses, teachers, and even their organization. A poor television program does not last beyond 13 weeks these days, but how many schools drop an unpopular or badly taught course or an inadequate teacher at any time?

Compared to the schools, the media have few problems and these tend to be with the other end of the audience spectrum. The mass-circulation maga- zines, the television networks and Hollywood have had little success in at- tracting the highly-educated audience and the intellectuals. This does not really worry the media, however, for being commercial enterprises, they do not have to serve the entire population; they can ignore the intellectuals. In fact, perhaps the major problem of the media today is to keep up with the increasing sophistication and the changing demands of its majority audiences; television is currently faced with rising audience dissatisfaction. Old favorites suddenly drop to the bottom of the ratings, and the majority of the new programs fail to survive their first year on the schedule. The schools may encounter the same dissatisfaction, but it is not a problem for them. Although many students are much better informed than their textbooks and teachers believe, when attendance is compulsory and school income is not affected by how students feel about what they are being taught, the schools do not have to pay attention to audience dissatisfaction. In fact, they tend to do so mainly

*Herbert J. Gans, "Audience Preferences for 'Reality' or 'Fantasy' in Mass Media Fare," Center for Urban Education, dittoed.

when it affects their property and the welfare of their staff; when slum children turn to vandalism, and become discipline problems.

One can also look at how the two institutions solve problems. The schools have a much harder time, for most of their problems are political. Not only must they persuade external agencies – governments and voters – to increase their budgets and grant them the right to provide equality and integration, but they must fight internal battles with conservative administrators who reject change, and with teachers who do not want to work with low-status students. (The media have a similar problem but solve it by paying higher salaries to those who create content of low prestige.) The school's struggle with external agencies is complicated by its lack of political power. Its direct constituents cannot vote, and its indirect ones, the parents, often are not sufficiently concerned to support the schools politically. Except in upper-middle-class communities, many voters often see the school as an enemy that tries to exact taxes from them for services ("frills") they do not want. Internal struggles are complicated by the fact that the school's employees are tenured professionals and can reject change as violating professional norms and privileges.

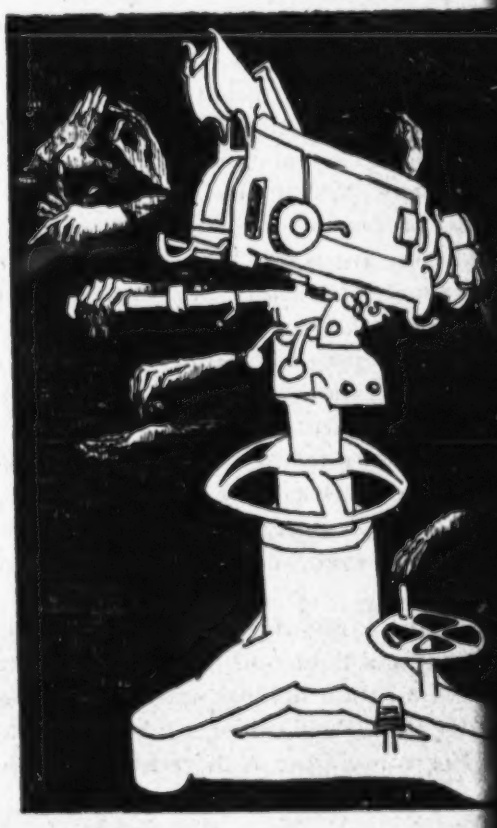
The mass media do not depend on the political arena for their survival, and when they must obtain F.C.C. licenses or mail privileges, they can generate enough power to get what they want from government. Their power results in part from their affluence; they can provide campaign funds – although they spend somewhat less on lobbying than the National Education Association. But in large part, their power derives from their relationship to their constituents; the students are on their side and the politicians know this. Moreover, every constituent, regardless of age, can vote: by buying or not buying a magazine, supporting or not supporting a sponsor, so that the mass media as a whole are much more responsive to the voters than the schools. They watch voter behavior much more carefully, and they do audience research to make sure that they remain responsive to their constituents. The schools only conduct audience research when the audience misbehaves and causes trouble for the teachers. After all, no one studied the "culturally deprived" until slum children became discipline problems. The mass media are also more effective at reaching their youthful constituents; many children bother their mothers to buy products they have seen advertised on television, but how many children bother their parents to vote for a school bond issue? Moreover, the mass media are better geared to experimentation and innovation; more money is spent on television pilots than on pilot projects in curriculum innovation.

Teaching and Learning in the Two Institutions

The most important issue is, of course, how well the two institutions teach and how well their students learn. But here there are few answers so that the analysis must be restricted mainly to posing questions. It is easy to study empirically how the two institutions develop their curricula and teaching methods. The media draw on box office figures, ratings and to discover what their students want to learn, and althoug actually create the programs rarely pay attention to audien to be sufficiently like their audience to provide material entertains both teachers and audience. The schools, on the seldom taken student demands into account in formulating current curriculum reforms in social studies, the sciences draw on experienced classroom teachers, who know what c and are able to learn, in devising new materials, and the being tested in ways similar to program pretesting in televi

The schools are, however, handicapped in two ways. Fir pare their curricula with an eye to the universities, and these about what must be taught, and what kinds of courses you taken in high school in order to matriculate. Powerful cons tent of instruction are thus introduced into the public s Second, the schools must provide the kinds of education an the adults who control the national power structure and necessary to create useful citizens and jobholders. Altho evidence exists to support their judgment that children n three R's and other subjects through a logically integrated process of organized instruction, the schools have not yet off approach to preparing youngsters for adulthood. More function is to teach children, and to teach them what adult to learn, whereas teaching is only a secondary – and la the mass media. And, since their student body is not limite are under no pressure from adults to limit their content t children, except for the sporadic pressure that comes from to too much sex and violence on TV.

The mass media also have an easier time in perfecting w the people they hire to teach. Since most of the mass medi by national organizations which cater to large audiences, huge sums for program preparation, and can pay high sal best people – who then teach audiences that number in schools are locally run, tied to the classroom, and must p teachers for small audiences. There is no room in the sch tionally known stars; it must, like local television and n people with average skills and conventional ideas. Mor draw many teachers from teachers' colleges that instruct educational methods and frequently discourage the use o ods. In the mass media, method is learned on the job, sacred; innovators are encouraged, that which works is often copied *ad nauseum*. If we could measure how well t the schools teach, we would probably discover that the better than the schools; and the local media, perhaps no b



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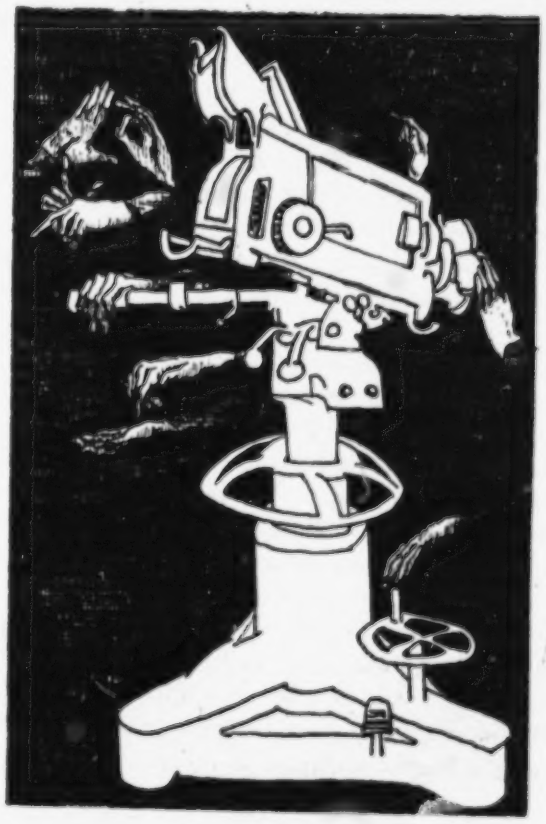
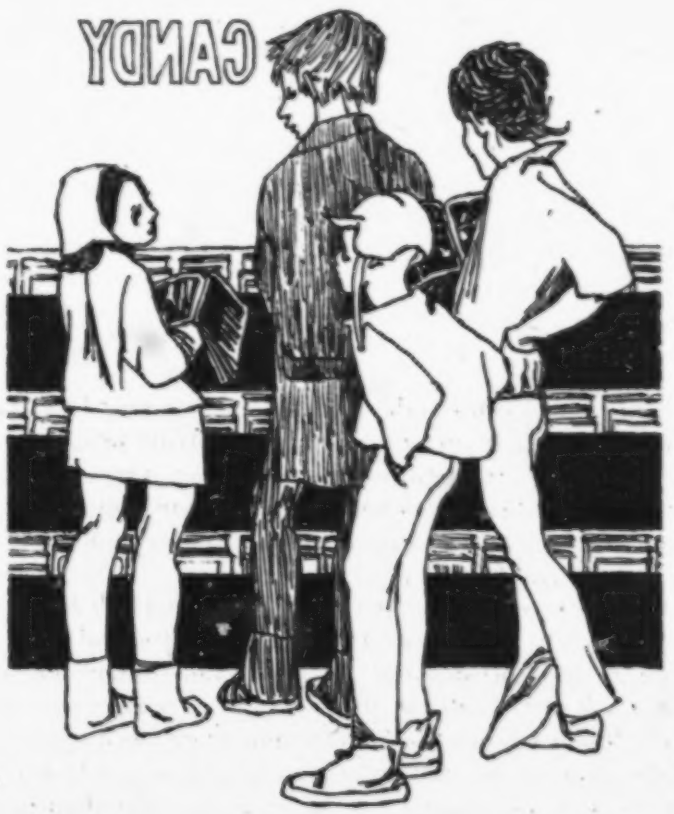
he two institutions develop their curricula and teaching methods. The media draw on box office figures, ratings and audience research to discover what their students want to learn, and although the people who actually create the programs rarely pay attention to audience data, they tend to be sufficiently like their audience to provide material that interests and entertains both teachers and audience. The schools, on the other hand, have seldom taken student demands into account in formulating courses, although current curriculum reforms in social studies, the sciences and mathematics draw on experienced classroom teachers, who know what children care about and are able to learn, in devising new materials, and the new materials are being tested in ways similar to program pretesting in television.

The schools are, however, handicapped in two ways. First, they must prepare their curricula with an eye to the universities, and these have firm notions about what must be taught, and what kinds of courses youngsters must have taken in high school in order to matriculate. Powerful constraints on the content of instruction are thus introduced into the public school curriculum. Second, the schools must provide the kinds of education and certification that the adults who control the national power structure and economy think is necessary to create useful citizens and jobholders. Although no empirical evidence exists to support their judgment that children must be taught the three R's and other subjects through a logically integrated curriculum and a process of organized instruction, the schools have not yet offered an alternative approach to preparing youngsters for adulthood. Moreover, the school's function is to teach children, and to teach them what adults think they ought to learn, whereas teaching is only a secondary — and latent — function for the mass media. And, since their student body is not limited to children, they are under no pressure from adults to limit their content to what is good for children, except for the sporadic pressure that comes from those who object to too much sex and violence on TV.

The mass media also have an easier time in perfecting what they teach and the people they hire to teach. Since most of the mass media fare is provided by national organizations which cater to large audiences, they can draw on huge sums for program preparation, and can pay high salaries to attract the best people — who then teach audiences that number in the millions. The schools are locally run, tied to the classroom, and must provide millions of teachers for small audiences. There is no room in the school system for nationally known stars; it must, like local television and newspapers, rely on people with average skills and conventional ideas. Moreover, the schools draw many teachers from teachers' colleges that instruct them in particular educational methods and frequently discourage the use of distinctive methods. In the mass media, method is learned on the job, and no method is sacred; innovators are encouraged, that which works is adopted — and then often copied *ad nauseum*. If we could measure how well the mass media and the schools teach, we would probably discover that the national media do better than the schools; and the local media, perhaps no better and no worse.





But the most significant and most difficult question is: what do students learn in the two institutions, how well do they learn what these offer them; and how well do they learn what they need to know to live in adult society? These questions can only be asked of the audience, and neither the media nor the schools have tried to ask them with any degree of seriousness. Teachers give tests and have some measure of what students have learned, or at least whether they have learned to give the teacher what he wants, and there have been studies of the impact of different kinds of schooling on I.Q. and other intelligence tests. The media, of course, rarely test their students, although they do ask viewers and readers whether they recall commercials. But none of the research is reliable enough; for example, just when market researchers thought they had found that the hard sell and repetition are most effective in teaching commercial messages, the advertisers began to switch to soft sell and comedy. (Most likely audiences are as diverse as students; some learn better with a hard sell, others with a soft sell, although most seem to learn what they want to learn from the product and not the commercial.) Two decades ago, a number of studies were done on the short-range effects of the media on attitudes, but these proved largely inconclusive, suggesting that people tend to see and hear from media material what they want to see and hear and that consequently, the media tend to reinforce already held attitudes rather than to change them. We know less about the "informational effects" of the media; what people learn in the way of facts and interpretations of fact; and we know almost nothing about the effects of school on student attitudes.

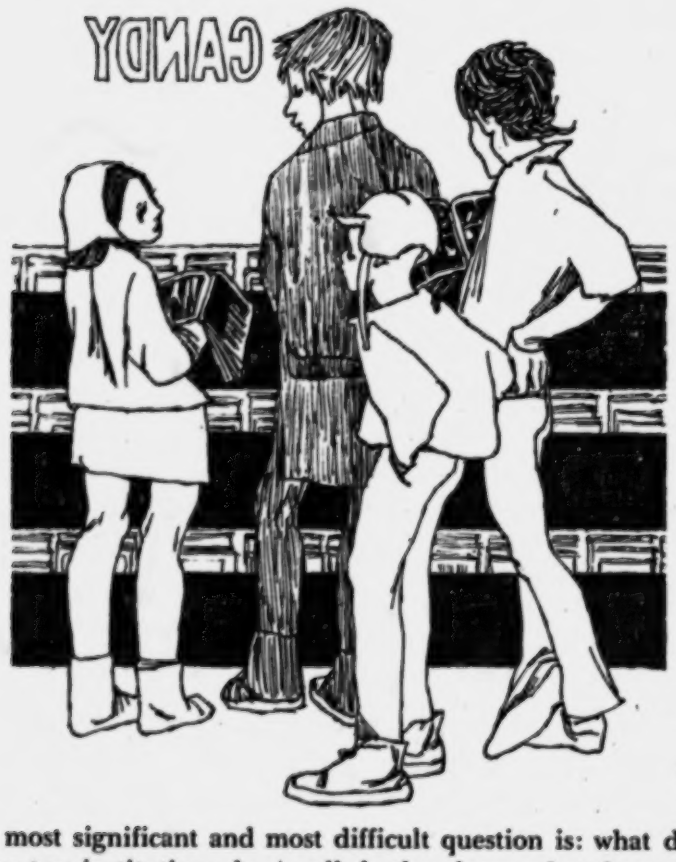
My hunch is that the schools are best in teaching their students basic methods of formal communication, including the three R's, as well as an array of socially and occupationally relevant skills; that the media allow children to learn what is going on in the modern world, politically and culturally, and that in both, students learn many large lumps of often unimportant or irrelevant facts. From the media, children also learn the ideals, basic values and the mood or ethos of the dominant American culture, that of the lower middle class, particularly about the details of consumption and having fun. But children probably learn the most important aspects of life neither in the classroom nor in front of the TV set. The schools may lecture them on home economics and family living, and the media will provide highly romantic versions of marital life (which children probably absorb more readily than the lectures), but the most important lessons in the school of socialization are still being taught by the family and the peer group, as well as in the situations in which people find themselves, on the job, in marriage, and at the public meetings in which they appear as citizens. The school's facts and the media's moods provide some raw material with which to prepare for and confront these situations, but their share of all the teaching and learning that go on in society is still relatively small.

Yet students do learn something from both school and mass media, and until we can go beyond hunches, we can only ask questions. Do children today learn more about the world and how to live in it than their cessors? Do children become better citizens through telev or through civics texts, or are neither as important as wh they become adults and have to act as citizens? Will childr crime as a phenomenon and as a social problem from "crime unit" in social studies? Or, would the best solutio to have them watch "Batman" and then show them how in a picture of crime it presents? Or would they learn mo community's police department? Is the school really bett ing, writing and other technical skills, or are there way media – and even entertainment programs – for this pur

Moreover, we need to know how the learning process institution and what components are significant. Is the message, as Marshall McLuhan insists, and is content al this is too extreme a formulation, as I believe it is, wh medium have; how do children learn differently from T magazine and the comic book? In addition, we need to of the media content are significant for learning. If peo ested in fiction, does this mean that dramatizing "facts" is mentary – or a classroom discussion? And if dramatizin ing, as I suspect it does, what element of the drama is most ing. Is it the plot or the characters, or both? If the latter, acters are most persuasive? Judging by the emphasis on se reappearance of familiar characters in TV, the hero is ve so, we do not know who learns what from what kinds of he even know whether it is the hero per se, or the hero as pl actor.

We must also determine the learning implications of th the media content is received. What impact does watchin on learning and what role does the presence or absence the viewing child? Is it true, as some suggest, that childre erally) learn more in the darkness and impersonality of than in the living room? And if so, what role do the a most people go to the movies play; does the real learning after the movie, when peers discuss what they have just s

Similar questions have already been asked about the s sufficiently to provide firm answers. We still do not know dren learn what from what kinds of teachers, in what size what sorts of school climates. What do children learn b teaching approach of the past; and what from restrictive organized classrooms; from a homogeneous class of stud neous one? What are the qualities in the teacher that make – for what kinds of students? Would the mass media serv here; would a teacher who resembled Walter Cronkite or



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Moreover, we need to know how the learning process takes place in each institution and what components are significant. Is the medium really the message, as Marshall McLuhan insists, and is content almost irrelevant? If this is too extreme a formulation, as I believe it is, what impact does the medium have; how do children learn differently from TV, the movies, the magazine and the comic book? In addition, we need to know which aspects of the media content are significant for learning. If people are more interested in fiction, does this mean that dramatizing "facts" is better than a documentary – or a classroom discussion? And if dramatizing encourages learning, as I suspect it does, what element of the drama is most important for learning. Is it the plot or the characters, or both? If the latter, what kinds of characters are most persuasive? Judging by the emphasis on series and the weekly reappearance of familiar characters in TV, the hero is very important. Even so, we do not know who learns what from what kinds of heroes, and we do not even know whether it is the hero per se, or the hero as played by a particular actor.

We must also determine the learning implications of the context in which the media content is received. What impact does watching TV at home have on learning and what role does the presence or absence of parents play on the viewing child? Is it true, as some suggest, that children (and people generally) learn more in the darkness and impersonality of the movie theater than in the living room? And if so, what role do the associates with whom most people go to the movies play; does the real learning perhaps take place after the movie, when peers discuss what they have just seen?

Similar questions have already been asked about the school, although not sufficiently to provide firm answers. We still do not know what kinds of children learn what from what kinds of teachers, in what size classrooms, and in what sorts of school climates. What do children learn better from the rote teaching approach of the past; and what from restrictively (or permissively) organized classrooms; from a homogeneous class of students or a heterogeneous one? What are the qualities in the teacher that make him a good teacher – for what kinds of students? Would the mass media serve as a useful model here; would a teacher who resembled Walter Cronkite or David Brinkley, or

Ed Sullivan or Jackie Gleason be more successful, and if so, which of these diverse personalities would be the best model for a new teacher?

Some Policy Implications

If a comparative analysis is to be more than an academic exercise, it must ultimately focus on policy. It would be easy to argue that the schools ought to copy some of the more successful techniques of the mass media – and I shall so argue shortly – but it cannot be forgotten that they have a different and a tougher assignment. The mass media's prime function is to entertain that portion of the total audience affluent enough to buy their services and advertised products. They can give these people what they want. The school, on the other hand, is a public institution which must serve all children, and it must teach them not what they want to learn, but what they will need to know in order to become adults. One cannot, therefore, expect the schools to be like the mass media; to teach mainly by entertainment and diversion. Similarly, one cannot expect the mass media to become quasi schools; as long as they are profit-seeking firms they must attract an audience and must give that audience what it wants (or what it will accept). However high the "educational potential" of television, it cannot give its viewers the education that they do not want, even if educators think they ought to have it.

It is, of course, possible to be utopian and suggest that some schools could become profit-seeking agencies, which could then offer their students what these (or their parents) want. Similarly, one can suggest that government ought to set up its own mass media outlets and devote these to formal education. There are pros and cons to both alternatives, but both seem to me to be worth trying. It has not yet been proven that children *must* learn what they are now taught at various ages to become effective adults; perhaps they might benefit from spending the first years of elementary school life in learning what they want to learn – either on the basis of the kindergarten or the mass media model – and to postpone writing, arithmetic and all technical skill training except for reading, until they are older. A good argument can certainly be made for not exposing children to social studies until they are old enough to understand the nature of society and politics, and for postponing teaching of any job-related skills until they have a clearer notion of who they are, what they want to do, where their talents lie and what jobs are available to them in adulthood.

But it is not necessary to propose utopian alternatives; the comparative analysis has a number of implications for the present school system. I shall concentrate on only a few, particularly on the media's demonstrated ability at engaging a child's interest and holding his attention more adequately than the school. This raises a number of questions that deserve answers, both through research and experimentation. Perhaps school learning should not be a compulsory process; could not the voluntary and self-selective approach by which the TV viewer and the magazine reader learn be applied to the classroom as well? Children might learn more, and more effectively, if the teacher had some of the personal qualities of the entertainer or television commentator; and if he or she used some of the media's dramatic and expository methods. They would surely learn more willingly if they were treated more as equals and if they were bound by fewer rules, as in the mass media. Also, they might learn more in natural peer groupings rather than in the formal class; and if the classroom atmosphere were more like the home or the peer group *milieu*. Most generally, learning would improve if the school became more audience oriented, and if the organization and power structure of the school were more student centered.

But my analysis raises even more fundamental questions: *What* should children be learning? Should they continue to learn the culture of the schools, or should they be learning more (or all) of the culture of the mass media, even in school? Is the school culture, that child of 19th-century Pr faire and rural America, of an emerging industrial and urba an economy of scarcity, relevant to the multiethnic, multira religious post industrial society of today, with its metropolita tan settlement pattern and its economy of affluence-with-p culture does today's child really need to know?

Such an analysis, which should, of course, be applied to bot the mass media, might quickly isolate the anachronistic and o vant or undesirable structures and functions (and content each institution. It would call for an end to social studies co more with the Indians than with the Vietnamese; or more wi with the organization of the milk industry – as well as to telev about the wild West and private eyes in which an individua without the help of organized society. It would certainly s school's conception of the child, which developed in an era in no democracy or equality for children – or a teen-age youth to be replaced. It would indicate also that the conception of t professional who has a monopoly of knowledge about ed emerged when the students came from immigrant, rural, an literate homes, is no longer applicable in an era when the m informed both children and parents.

Even so, the analysis also suggests that there can be no eit no choice between school or mass media, for the two institutio not only a different content but a different world view. Each r cultural, economic and political groups in our pluralistic so is busy trying to dominate the communication channels of th its own world view. If the schools are the agents of Protestant class culture, of employers seeking trained workers, and of p to equip their children with marketable job skills, the m s agents of post-Puritan middle and working-class cultures, of th goods industries, and of parents (and children) who want to co course, each institution supports and defends many other inte both the school and the mass media are, in the broadest sense, tutions competing for cultural power in the society. Such c many advantages, particularly as long as there is no consensus mate goals of education. But in a pluralist society there will al lack of consensus – and there should be. American democ teaches that when ultimate agreement is impossible, the best sol ism; as wide a variety of educational institutions with dive educational approaches – as possible.

Even if a comparative analysis of the schools and the mas with this pluralistic premise, it is still possible to ask – and to each institution can do most effectively, and what it should ferently. If there is much the schools can learn from the mass m can also learn much from the schools. And, if the analytic net is further, one can ask similar questions about yet other educatio in our society: for example, the family, the peer group, the ch and the political process. If the schools want to improve thei they might well ask not only what they can learn from the m also what they can learn from how the family teaches its childr ful peer groups educate their members, or how candidates for the voters how to vote for them.

Herbert J. Gans, a senior research sociologist at the Center, is the autho Villagers *and of* The Levittowners, *to be published in May by Pa*

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Such an analysis, which should, of course, be applied to both the school and the mass media, might quickly isolate the anachronistic and otherwise irrelevant or undesirable structures and functions (and content and method) in each institution. It would call for an end to social studies courses that deal more with the Indians than with the Vietnamese; or more with the cow than with the organization of the milk industry – as well as to television programs about the wild West and private eyes in which an individual hero succeeds without the help of organized society. It would certainly suggest that the school's conception of the child, which developed in an era in which there was no democracy or equality for children – or a teen-age youth culture – needs to be replaced. It would indicate also that the conception of the teacher as a professional who has a monopoly of knowledge about education, which emerged when the students came from immigrant, rural, and frequently illiterate homes, is no longer applicable in an era when the mass media have informed both children and parents.

Even so, the analysis also suggests that there can be no either-or solution, no choice between school or mass media, for the two institutions are teaching not only a different content but a different world view. Each represents some cultural, economic and political groups in our pluralistic society, and each is busy trying to dominate the communication channels of that society with its own world view. If the schools are the agents of Protestant lower-middle-class culture, of employers seeking trained workers, and of parents seeking to equip their children with marketable job skills, the mass media are the agents of post-Puritan middle and working-class cultures, of the consumption goods industries, and of parents (and children) who want to consume. And, of course, each institution supports and defends many other interests. In short, both the school and the mass media are, in the broadest sense, political institutions competing for cultural power in the society. Such competition has many advantages, particularly as long as there is no consensus about the ultimate goals of education. But in a pluralist society there will always be such a lack of consensus – and there should be. American democratic tradition teaches that when ultimate agreement is impossible, the best solution is pluralism; as wide a variety of educational institutions with diverse goals – and educational approaches – as possible.

Even if a comparative analysis of the schools and the mass media begins with this pluralistic premise, it is still possible to ask – and to answer – what each institution can do most effectively, and what it should be doing differently. If there is much the schools can learn from the mass media, the media can also learn much from the schools. And, if the analytic net is widened even further, one can ask similar questions about yet other educational institutions in our society: for example, the family, the peer group, the church, the store, and the political process. If the schools want to improve their effectiveness, they might well ask not only what they can learn from the mass media, but also what they can learn from how the family teaches its children, how youthful peer groups educate their members, or how candidates for election teach the voters how to vote for them.

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